



Dana E. Blackwell
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LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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DR. HARRIETTE WILLIAMS, CHAIR

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **August 30, 2004**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Patricia Curry
Brenda Galloway
Phalen G. Hurewitz
Helen Kleinberg
Christina S. Mattingly
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi
Joyce Fahey
Daisy Ma
Trinity Wallace-Ellis, Youth Representative

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The revised agenda for the August 30, 2004, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the July 26, 2004, meeting were unanimously approved.

The minutes of the August 2, 2004, meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Commissioner Hurewitz reviewed the draft of a letter to CBS, Sony, and the executive producer of the television show *The Young and the Restless*, acknowledging that program's positive introduction of a foster care theme into its storyline. Victoria Rowell, a client of Commissioner Hurewitz, is an actress on the show and a former foster child. David Sanders, who has viewed some episodes, said that the department will also be recognizing the show's efforts. Commissioner Sorkin moved to approve the letter in concept; Commissioner McClaney seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.
- Commissioner Hurewitz updated the Commission on the situation with Regional Centers, whose foster-care clients qualify for the Alternative Residential Model (ARM) rate when they are legally adopted. State law requires that Regional Centers write a letter when a child qualifies for the ARM rate—which is then paid by the department—but Regional Centers in Los Angeles County have been refusing to write these letters for some time. They have, in fact, filed a lawsuit asking the court to suspend their part in that function. Child advocates have requested that the centers continue to write ARM letters until the court reaches a decision, but that is not occurring.

The Alliance for Children's Rights and Public Counsel have learned that Regional Centers are apparently still performing ARM assessments, just not writing the letters containing their results. All seven Los Angeles County Regional Centers refused a meeting with child advocates, the department and the Commission pending the outcome of the litigation.

While this matter is being resolved, many families who have adopted seriously disabled children will be up for rate reassessment. They will suffer hardship—and adoptions may be destabilized—if their support is cut. Public Counsel wants to make sure that families are paid at Level 2 at the lowest, or receive the F rate, until ARM rates are reissued. Dr. Sanders said that the state is not supportive of using old rates, despite the fact that a precedent for doing so was set for children who move out of state, and many seriously disabled children's conditions do not change. The next step is a conference call with state officials.

A letter has also been sent asking Kim Belshé, the state's Secretary for Health and Human Services, to intervene with the Department of Social Services and the Department of Developmental Services. The Alliance and Public Counsel will pursue compliance until the law is changed.

Commissioner Sorkin suggested enlisting Judge Nash's help, since Regional Centers have been participating on his interagency committee. Commissioner Curry recommended calling Larry Bolton, who has received copies of relevant letters. Commissioner Hurewitz suspects that budget issues may be at the bottom of this issue, and urged the Commission to watch developments closely.

Commissioner Kleinberg commented that difficulties have been experienced with Regional Centers for many years, partly because they are all independent nonprofit organizations that contract with the state. When the MacLaren Children's Center Committee explored the idea of the county's contracting directly with Regional Centers, it was told that Los Angeles was the only county experiencing problems with the centers. This is probably because other counties have only one center, while Los Angeles has seven. The boards of these agencies are dominated by the parents of disabled children, who may believe that resources allocated to foster children reduce those available for their own. Commissioner Hurewitz suggested a legislative remedy to broaden participation on these boards.

- Chair Williams reviewed drafts of support letters for the national Kinship Caregiver Support Act introduced by Senator Hillary Clinton and scheduled for a vote within the next couple of weeks. One letter urges the Board of Supervisors to support the legislation, and the second expresses the Commission's support to Senator Feinstein.

Though the Commission does not normally take a public position on legislation prior to a formal vote by the Board of Supervisors, time is short. County Counsel has agreed that the Commission has the latitude to express its support for the Act, though it is more appropriate to wait until the Board votes. Commissioner Hurewitz suggested that, instead of the Commission's writing to Senator Feinstein, Commissioners send support letters as individuals.

Commissioner Curry said that the Board of Supervisors may send a five-signature letter without going through its lengthy legislative review process, and a request for that should be added to the draft Board letter. Commissioner Kleinberg pressed for stronger language, expressing more urgency regarding Federal leadership on this important issue.

Commissioner Hurewitz moved to accept the draft letter to the Board of Supervisors as amended through this discussion. Commissioner McClaney seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

- The work group presentations were well received by the Board deputies; although all Commissioners agreed that a presentation should now be made to the Board itself, the question remains as to whether three reports should be presented or a combined summary. It is clear that the recommendations from these reports require community development in many areas, and cannot be accomplished by the department alone. Commissioner Curry volunteered to quickly draft a one-page outline of a countywide plan and structure, and circulate it for comments.
- Vice Chair Ma will chair the September 7 Commission meeting, and Commissioner Fahey will present the Nominating Committee report.
- Chair Williams recently made a two-hour presentation to the civil grand jury on the work of the Commission.

- Commissioner Sorkin reminded her colleagues that 2005 is the Commission's sunset year; a committee on this issue will be formed at the retreat.

APPRECIATION OF JENNY WEISZ

Chair Williams presented a certificate of appreciation to Jenny Weisz, directing attorney for children's rights at Public Counsel, whose husband will be teaching at Harvard University and who is therefore relocating to that area. Ms. Weisz has been a constant advocate during her years in Los Angeles, and will be remembered as a calm and perceptive visionary who never feared to speak out on behalf of children.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- The department is currently working on the Request for Proposal (RFP) for family preservation services, restructuring it to allocate dollars consistent with Federal law—20 percent each for family support, family preservation, adoption support, and family reunification. It will be a performance-based contract with prevention tie-ins to the work group recommendations. Input has been received from the 38 agencies currently funded, as well as from more than 200 stakeholders at a recent meeting. Meetings within each service planning area (SPA) are planned next, to hear from providers and the community. The RFP is expected to be issued in late 2004. Commissioner Sorkin requested clarification as to the timeline in light of the fact that current contracts have been extended through December 31, 2004. Dr. Sanders indicated that contracts have been further extended to end on June 30, 2005.

The definitions of family support and reunification contained in the recent work group reports have not been made public to the community, Commissioner Kleinberg said, and she encouraged the development of a marketing strategy prior to meetings in the SPAs. Commissioner Sorkin, who has attended the first two stakeholder gatherings, said that providers are not happy with the switch in funding formulas. They are concerned that their freedom to decide who participates will be compromised, and fear the consequences if they are not able to locate a sufficient number of clients for each different program allocation. Commissioner Sorkin indicated that the Promoting Safe and Stable Families RFP provides the Department with the opportunity to fund services for families who have been brought to the attention of the Department but are not formally opened.

- The department is serving on the IV-E waiver negotiation team with Federal and state representatives, and information has been requested on cost projections and cost-neutrality as well as on the pre/post evaluation design. Evaluations are typically performed with a control group that receives no services, as with wraparound, but Dr. Sanders believes that the pre/post approach is more appropriate, even though cost projections are more difficult. Commissioner Hurewitz asked if it might be worthwhile to retain an economist or other analyst for advice on the cost-neutrality issue.
- A shortfall in county child welfare dollars could occur because of changes in how counties draw from a \$90 to \$100 million state augmentation fund. If the governor's

veto is not overruled, counties will need to match \$5.9 million of former state monies in order to draw from that fund, in essence creating a budget hole of more than \$10 million (including the Federal match). SB 1612 is currently on the governor's desk for signature.

- Responses to the issuance of the new group home contract are due on September 7, and the contract will take effect on November 1. Commissioner Curry congratulated Dr. Sanders on the ultimate success of its long development process.
- Commissioner Sorkin requested that in the future Dr. Sanders comment on the semi-annual performance report to the Board of Supervisors that was included in member packets. He will address that report at the Commission's next meeting, if there is time enough on the agenda.

SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Genie Chough and Lisa Campbell-Mouton reviewed the system improvement plan (SIP) due to the state on September 30, to be approved by the Board of Supervisors on September 14. A self-assessment snapshot of departmental outcomes was submitted in June; this plan—which covers October 1, 2004, through September 30, 2005—focuses on the overall areas needing improvement, listing improvement goals and strategies as well as milestones, timeframes, departmental leads, and partners.

1. **Recurrence of maltreatment**—Reduce from 10.3 percent to 8.9 percent.
2. **Rate of abuse and neglect in foster care** (not including group homes or relative care)—Reduce by 20 percent.
3. **Length of time to reunification**—Increase by 10 percent the number of children who return home in less than 12 months.
4. **Length of time to adoption**—Increase to 16 percent the number of foster children who are adopted within 24 months of removal from the home.
5. **Management Information Systems**
 - Enhance CWS/CMS to allow the tracking of all programs or initiatives.
 - Integrate all non-financial systems into the CWS/CMS Datamart, and all financial systems into Los Angeles County's new county budgeting and account system, e-CAPS.
 - Improve the length of time to complete CWS/CMS data entry, and increase the accuracy and validity of existing data.
 - Obtain funding for a statewide automated system for Probation; in the interim, obtain access for Probation to CWS/CMS and the DCFS I-TRACK system.
6. **Services array**
 - Increase the availability of community-based services in the areas of prevention, reunification, and permanency, as recommended by the three Board-approved work groups.

- Through the use of up-front and preventive services, reduce the need for detention by 10 percent.
- Increase the number of Probation services to assist youth exiting foster care through legal guardianship, adoption, or emancipation.

7. Workload

- Create a manageable caseload and workload for children's social workers and supervisors, taking into account the impact of family team decision-making and other tools.
- Increase the amount of time Probation officers spend with Probation foster youth by decreasing their workload.

Ms. Campbell-Mouton particularly stressed the need for Probation access to the history of the children it serves, since as many as half may come from the dependency side and require the same services and structures.

Commissioner Kleinberg questioned one of the milestones listed in SIP 3 (1.1.2), saying that her understanding of the discussion surrounding this issue was that a workload study to analyze case flow data would be developed during the year, not that the data itself would be analyzed. Learning new skills like team decision-making takes time, and the impact of those tools on the workload will take time to assess. The training necessary for this culture change will be extensive, as will the implications for hiring and promoting staff—especially with the integration of the Probation Department.

Commissioner Sorkin emphasized that Structured Decision Making (SDM) involves more than the safety and risk assessments. SDM also includes the family strengths and needs assessments. This is to be completed with the safety and risk assessments on the front end to assist in identifying possible barriers to reunification. The complete SDM tool and the various assessments should be included in SIP 3.

Regarding the workload and service array sections, Commissioner Hurewitz suggested looking at resources to develop a core of volunteers who would work under the supervision of social workers to handle a number of concerns. A dialogue with the union would be necessary, but Commissioner Sorkin commented that volunteers could be very helpful with family visitations, especially on weekends when employees prefer not to work.

Commissioner Curry expressed her concerns about the tracking of data and the enforcement of both this system improvement plan and the performance-based contracts now being issued by the department. Angela Carter is scheduled to address the Commission about these issues at its next meeting.

Commissioner Hurewitz moved that the Commission accept and approve the system improvement plan subject to the changes addressed in this discussion. Commissioner Mattingly seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Chair Williams recognized and thanked Commissioners Kleinberg, Sorkin, and Mattingly for their work on the plan.

CHILDREN'S BUDGET/PERFORMANCE COUNTS

Chair Williams apologized to Lari Sheehan and Deena Margolis from the Chief Administrative Office for having to delay their agenda item until another meeting (probably in late September). They asked that Commissioners review the distributed materials ahead of time if possible, paying particular attention to the new budget section on funding streams. Commissioner Hurewitz will schedule a Budget Committee meeting prior to their presentation, to which all Commissioners are invited.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Patricia Mulcahey inquired about a number of matters, and also raised issues surrounding her son, who is in foster care. Chair Williams made it clear that the Commission could not answer specific questions nor discuss open cases in a public forum.

MEETING ADJOURNED